

Message Text

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TAGS: PORG, EEC, FR

SUBJECT: FRENCH DEBATE OVER POPULARLY ELECTED

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT: GOF OPTIONS

REF: A) 75 PARIS 33586, B) PARIS 01868

SUMMARY: REFTEL A SUGGESTED THAT THE ISSUE OF DIRECT
POPULAR ELECTIONS FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT APPEARED
A SAFE ONE FOR PRESIDENT GISCARD D'ESTAING. THIS
CONTINUES TO BE THE CASE. WITH THE EXCEPTION OF SOME
HARD-LINE GAULLISTS AND THE COMMUNISTS, MOST POLITICAL
FORMATIONS ARE SUPPORTING THE PROPOSITION IN PRINCIPLE.

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DEBATE IS NOW TURNING TO SEVERAL "SECONDARY" ISSUES

INVOLVING HOW THE DECEMBER COUNCIL OF EUROPE DECISION CALLING FOR POPULAR ELECTIONS IN 1978 SHOULD BE IMPLEMENTED IN FRANCE. GOF HANDLING OF THESE ISSUES WILL BE DETERMINED BY THE OVERRIDING CONSIDERATION OF OBTAINING FRENCH APPROVAL FOR THE PROPOSITION. WITHIN THESE PARAMETERS, THERE IS ALSO SOME LATITUDE TO EMPLOY THE ISSUE FOR INTERNAL POLITICAL GAIN. THIS TELEGRAM CONSIDERS SOME OF THE OPTIONS NOW AVAILABLE TO THE GOF. END SUMMARY.

1. IN PRINCIPLE AT LEAST, THE FRENCH SUPPORT THE CONCEPT OF A POPULARLY ELECTED EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT. THE LATEST POLL (DECEMBER 75) INDICATED THAT 69 PERCENT OF THOSE QUESTIONED WERE FAVORABLE. IN LARGE MEASURE, THE SAME WOULD SEEM TRUE FOR THEIR POLITICAL LEADERS. WITH THE EXCEPTION OF THE COMMUNISTS (PCF) AND SOME HARD-LINE GAULLISTS (UDR), MOST POLITICAL FORMATIONS HAVE ANNOUNCED THEIR SUPPORT IN PRINCIPLE. THE GOF NOW MUST DETERMINE HOW IT WISHES TO TRANSLATE SUCH SUPPORT INTO A FRENCH DECISION TO IMPLEMENT THE DECEMBER ROME COUNCIL OF EUROPE DECISION SETTING 1978 FOR POPULAR ELECTIONS TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT.

2. THUS THE GOF MUST DECIDE WHAT MEANS SHOULD BE EMPLOYED TO ELICIT FRENCH APPROVAL. UNDER THE CONSTITUTION, THERE WOULD APPEAR TO BE TWO OPTIONS:

-- VOTE BY NATIONAL REFERENDUM

-- VOTE BY PARLIAMENT

GOF MUST ALSO DETERMINE THE QUESTION TO BE POSED IN A REFERENDUM OR PLACED BEFORE PARLIAMENT, I.E., THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM BY WHICH THE FRENCH WOULD DESIGNATE THEIR EUROPEAN REPRESENTATIVES. AGAIN, THERE ARE TWO ALTERNATIVES:

-- A NATIONAL ELECTION BASED ON A PROPORTIONAL VOTE, WITH REPRESENTATIVES ACCRUING TO EACH PARTY ACCORDING TO ITS PERCENTAGE OF THE POPULAR VOTE;

-- A SYSTEM BASED ON CONSTITUENCIES WITH A FIXED NUMBER OF REPRESENTATIVES CHOSEN ON WINNER-TAKE-ALL FORMAT.

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3. GOF'S CHOICE FROM AMONG ABOVE OPTIONS WILL, OF COURSE, BE PRIMARILY DETERMINED BY WHAT PRESIDENT GISCARD HOPES TO GAIN BY THE EXERCISE. WE SEE HIS MINIMUM GOAL, AND THE ONE WHICH WILL PROBABLY TAKE PRECEDENCE OVER ALL OTHERS, AS ASSURING FRENCH APPROVAL FOR DIRECT ELECTIONS. HIS PERSONAL PRESTIGE IS CLEARLY TIED TO A SUCCESSFUL OUTCOME, GIVEN HIS ROLE IN PROMOTING THE DECEMBER COUNCIL OF EUROPE

DECISION. WITHIN THE PARAMETERS OF THIS COMMITMENT
(I.E. TO DO NOTHING THAT WOULD SERIOUSLY RISK
EVENTUAL APPROVAL OF THE PROPOSITION), GISCARD MAY ALSO
SEE THE ISSUE AS A MEANS TO ISOLATE HARD-LINE
GAULLISTS AND TO EMBARRASS THE LEFT BY HIGHLIGHTING
DISAGREEMENTS OVER THE ISSUE IN THAT COALITION. THE
GOAL WOULD BE A BROAD COALITION OF MODERATES BACKING
THE PRESIDENT IN SUPPORT OF THE CONCEPT. SUCH AN
OUTCOME WOULD PROMOTE AN IMAGE, WHICH GISCARD SEEMS

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ANXIOUS TO CULTIVATE, OF "GOVERNING FROM THE CENTER."
MOREOVER, IT WOULD ALSO ALLOW HIM TO AGAIN POSE
(AS HE DID ON ABORTION AND THE 18 YEAR VOTE) AS A
LEADER WHOSE DECISIONS REFLECT WHAT IS RIGHT FOR
FRANCE RATHER THAN MERELY THE WISHES OF HIS MAJORITY.

4. GOF DECISION REGARDING MEASURES TO IMPLEMENT
DIRECT ELECTIONS PROBABLY WILL ALSO HAVE TO TAKE INTO
ACCOUNT THE VARIOUS AND SOMETIMES CONFLICTING
CONDITIONS POSED BY POLITICAL GROUPS SUPPORTING THE
PROPOSITION. FOR EXAMPLE, PS FIRST SECRETARY FRANCOIS
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MITTERRAND HAS TIED PS SUPPORT TO TWO FACTORS: THAT
ELECTIONS BE ON A NATIONAL, "PROPORTIONAL" BASIS
AND, THAT A REFERENDUM ON THE ISSUE BE FREE FROM ANY
TAINT OF "POLITICAL MANEUVERING" DESIGNED TO SPLIT
THE LEFT. SIMILARLY, THE MOVEMENT FOR THE
INDEPENDENCE OF EUROPE (MIE), COMPOSED OF GAULLISTS
AND CENTRISTS AND HEADED BY UDR "BARON" OLIVIER
GUICHARD, CONDITIONED ITS SUPPORT ON THE DEMAND THAT
ELECTIONS BE HELD ON THE SAME DAY IN ALL EC
NATIONS AND BE BASED ON IDENTICAL ELECTORAL
PROCEDURES.

5. AGAINST THIS BACKGROUND, MOST OBSERVERS ARE
PREDICTING THAT GISCARD WILL OPT FOR THE PARLIAMENTARY
ROUTE TO OBTAIN APPROVAL FOR HIS ELECTORAL PROPOSALS.
ASSUMING THAT MOST GAULLISTS CAN BE HELD IN LINE BY
PRIME MINISTER CHIRAC (WHO HAS CHARACTERIZED HIS
FOLLOWERS AS 80 PERCENT BEHIND THE PROPOSITION), A
POSITIVE VOTE BY THE LEGISLATURE WOULD SEEM A FOREGONE
CONCLUSION. MOREOVER, A PARLIAMENTARY VOTE WOULD
PROBABLY BE MORE ACCEPTABLE TO THE PS WHO COULD THUS
BACK THE ISSUE WHILE AVOIDING THE FANFARE OF A
NATIONAL REFERENDUM. AND FINALLY, THERE IS THE RISK
OF AN EMBARRASSING REPETITION OF POMPIDOU'S 1972
REFERENDUM RESULTS (ON EC EXPANSION) WHERE MOST VOTERS
AVOIDED THE POLLS.

6. AS FOR WHICH ELECTORAL PROCEDURES PARLIAMENT WOULD
BE ASKED TO APPROVE, CURRENT SPECULATION IS THAT
GISCARD WILL CHOOSE SOME VARIATION OF A CONSTITUENCY
SYSTEM. ACCORDING TO THIS REASONING, HE WOULD BE
LOATH TO ACCEPT MITTERRAND'S CALL FOR PROPORTIONAL
VOTING BECAUSE SUCH PROCEDURES MIGHT RESULT IN LEFT
CONTROL OF FRENCH EUROPEAN PARLIAMENTARY DELEGATION.
MOREOVER, ACCEPTANCE OF NATIONAL PROPORTIONAL VOTING
COULD PREJUDGE THE ISSUE FOR FRENCH LEGISLATIVE
CONTESTS. HE MAY SHOW SOME LATITUDE ON THE QUESTION,

HOWEVER, BY OFFERING A FORM OF ADJUSTED PROPORTIONAL VOTING WITHIN A CONSTITUENCY FORMAT, THEREBY GIVING THE SOCIALISTS AT LEAST PART OF WHAT THEY DESIRE. REGARDING MIE DEMANDS FOR EC-WIDE UNIFORM ELECTORAL PROCEDURES, LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ONE QUAI SOURCE HAS TOLD US THAT THE GOF WILL PROBABLY ARGUE THAT THE SIMILAR STIPULATION IN THE TREATY OF ROME SETS FORTH AN EVENTUAL GOAL RATHER THAN AN IMMEDIATE REQUIREMENT. IT WILL ALSO NOTE THAT THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ITSELF HAS PASSED A RESOLUTION PERMITTING NATIONAL ELECTION PROCEDURES DURING A FIVE-YEAR TRANSITION PERIOD.

7. COMMENT: MAJOR DANGER NOW FACING GOF EFFORTS TO OBTAIN FRENCH APPROVAL FOR POPULAR ELECTIONS TO EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT TAKES THE FORM OF A CAMPAIGN MOUNTED BY OPPONENTS TO EXPAND THE DEBATE INTO A CONSIDERATION OF OVERALL FRENCH EC POLICY. DEBRE AND OTHERS ARE CHARGING THAT, THROUGH ITS SUPPORT FOR THE PROPOSITION, GOF IS IN EFFECT PROMOTING ENHANCED POWERS FOR THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, AN ACCUSATION WHICH STRIKES A NERVE IN CHAUVINISTIC CIRCLES. IN ITS DEFENSE, GOF IS INSISTING (AS IS SOCIALIST LEADERSHIP), THAT ESTABLISHMENT OF POPULARLY-ELECTED EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT MERELY IMPLEMENTS ROME TREATY AND IN NO WAY IMPLIES INCREASED POWERS FOR THAT BODY.

8. SPECULATION NOW IS THAT GOF WILL SUBMIT ITS PROPOSALS TO FRENCH LEGISLATURE FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF DIRECT EUROPEAN ELECTIONS LATER THIS SPRING, FOLLOWING CANTONAL CONTESTS SCHEDULED FOR MARCH.
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